

# Jordan School District Music and Dance Therapy Program

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## Reaching Students with Special Needs through Music and Dance Therapy

In 1994 Bingham high school began an innovative program connecting special needs students with their high school peers through the arts – particularly music and dance. Since that time the program has expanded to include Bingham, Jordan, Riverton, and Alta high schools and currently focuses on music and dance therapy specifically. Funding for the program has come from the district and the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) through Special Education and Fine Arts grants.

Educators who teach students with special needs face many challenges due to the nature of their work with:

- Students with a broad range of physical and intellectual challenges and capabilities
- Students with Individual Education Plans (IEP) that contain very specific and unique goals
- Limited time and resources

While much of their work during the school day is designed to help students expand academic skills and prepare to participate in the community, progress is often slow and tedious. The music and dance therapy program has become part of the solution to these challenges.

Music and dance therapy are designed to help students and teachers reach desired educational goals while gaining arts skills, interacting socially, and having fun.

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**"I love working with the kids! I looked forward to it every month."  
Student Intern  
Bingham High School**

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There are two critical aspects of the Music/Dance therapy program described here:

1. Student interns selected from music and dance classes or peer tutors who register for the class at the high school and attend the special needs class regularly.
2. Licensed Music and Dance/movement therapists who meet weekly with the students – both special needs and student interns – as well as the teachers.

According to teacher report, both the therapist and the interns are critical to the success of the program. The therapist meets with the interns at the beginning of the year to plan together. The therapist provides the expertise and instruction based on the identified

IEP goals for each student.

The student interns provide one on one support for the special needs students. They report satisfaction with helping the students learn as well as developing positive relationships with them that often extend beyond the special education classroom.

When asked, virtually all student interns or peer tutors say they would participate for a second year, and therapists report that a number have gone on to college to major in music or dance therapy.

In addition to all other benefits of the program, the teachers report that the students love it and consistently ask if the dance or music therapist is coming – and when the answer is, "yes", they are thrilled.

## Timeline – Milestones

**1994** - Bingham high school Vice Principal Julie Christofferson, and special ed. coordinator, Helen Hooper, created a pilot program was begun with peer tutors from music classes interacting with students in special education classes. Christofferson applied for an arts grant from the USOE to support the program and together – vice principal, teachers, and students – created a program. Initially only the music teacher and students were involved, but in a short time the dance teacher and her students were invited to join as well. The goal of the program was to help the students gain social and intellectual skills, and was inspired by work done by Rosemary Pratt of Brigham Young University.

**1998** – Now working at the district office, Christofferson worked with Carol Ann Goodson at the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) to secure funding to continue the program at Bingham high school and expand it to include Jordan and Riverton high schools. As the program expanded, **Music and Dance therapists** were hired to work with the students and their teachers. The focus was on weekly instructional therapy sessions in music and movement/dance with a final performance for family and friends at the end of the school year.

**2003** - Alta high school had joined the program and the music and dance therapists began tying their instruction specifically to one or two of the students' **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** goals. Data were collected on each student to track progress on specific IEP goals. Student interns or peer tutors met with the students regularly build relationships, assist in skill development and observe and report data to the therapist after each session. Teachers reported that the identified IEP goals were met much faster with the music and dance therapy than without.

**2009** – Despite changes in personnel at the district and school level over the past few years, the program continues to thrive. Students, teachers, therapists, and parents continue to see positive results in academic progress, improved focus, physical coordination, and social and emotional growth for the special needs students. Current Jordan District Arts Coordinator Doug Allen continues to advocate for the program and special educators from non-participating schools have expressed an interest in having it expand to enable their students to participate. **Participating educators hope the program will continue both in Jordan and in the new Canyons School District.**



# Music, Dance & Movement Therapy

## Key differences between a Music or Dance/Movement Therapy program and other Music or Dance Classes

The essential difference lies in the goals of the instruction. The music or dance teacher's focus is primarily on the quality of the music or dance achieved – or the product the student is able to perform. A music or dance therapist focuses on what happens to the student as a result of the experience.

### Music Therapy

Requirements include:

Bachelor's Degree  
Internship  
National Board certification

*"Music therapy is a service provided for children to influence changes in learning or behavior patterns. It is recognized as one of the related services in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that can be used to assist a child with disabilities to benefit from special education.*

*"Music Therapy has been effective in helping children with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, brain injuries, chronic illnesses and more. Therapy is designed to reinforce and strengthen skills identified on the students Individual Education Plan (IEP) and can address areas such as receptive language, expressive language, socialization, and motor development."*

Information provided by Kathleen A. Coleman, MMT-BC. <http://www.specialchild.com/archives/ia-005.html>

### Dance/Movement Therapy

Requirements include:

A master's degree in dance/movement therapy or related field and knowledge and understanding and demonstrated competencies acquired through education, supervised internship, or work experience in the following areas: 1) Applications of dance/movement therapy with children; 2) Cognitive, social and psychological development; 3) Movement behavior and nonverbal communication; 4) Family systems theory; 5) Development through the lifespan; and 6) Multiculturalism and diversity."

*"Based on the understanding that the body and mind are interrelated, dance/movement therapy is defined as the psychotherapeutic use of movement to further the emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration of the individual. The dance/movement therapist focuses on movement behavior as it emerges in the therapeutic relationship. Expressive, communicative, and adaptive behaviors are all considered for both group and individual treatment. Body movement as the core component of dance simultaneously provides the means of assessment and the mode of intervention for dance/movement therapy."*

American Dance Therapy Association  
<http://www.adta.org/resources/education.cfm>

# Outcomes of the Jordan District Program

## Measuring Growth

When the therapists and teachers began focusing the music and dance on the students' Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals they were able to see strong evidence of growth over time.

Sample data reported here is taken from the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 annual reports. During these years initial sessions were used to assess the students and set individual goals. The remainder of the sessions included activities and interventions designed to facilitate the socialization, communication, and educational goals.

Following each session the therapist and student interns discussed the session and the therapist recorded session notes and gave each student a numerical score based on behavior and social interactions during the session.

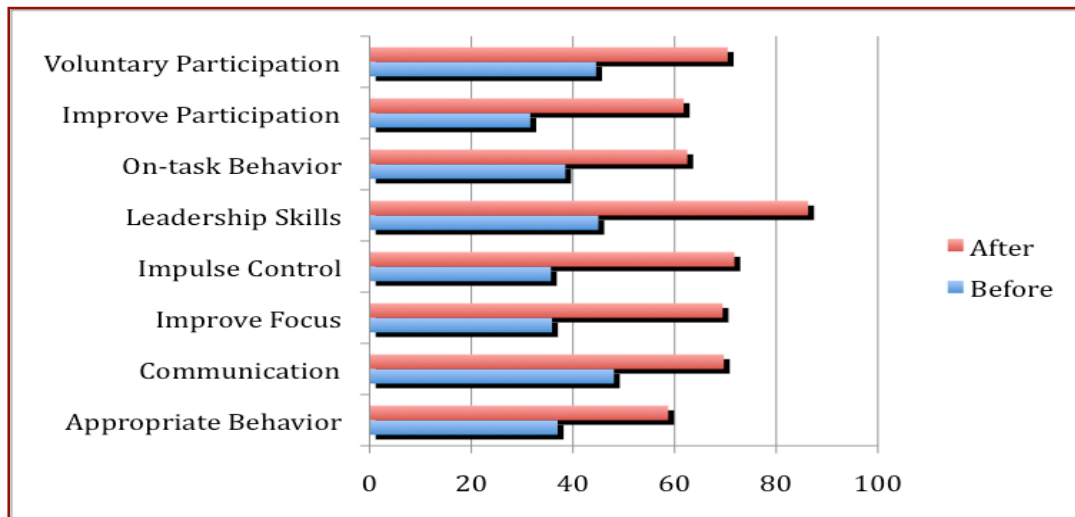
There was a general upward trend in virtually all students. Increased familiarity with the music therapist and the interns may have been a factor in this trend, but the session activities gave the students the opportunity to develop and demonstrate appropriate social responses and communication skills.

In addition to the IEP goals, the students gained arts related skills including playing bells, drums and autoharps, and singing or physically responding to songs.

Dance skills included rhythmic movement, specific steps and movements, and partner work.

Other observable skills and dispositions include focused attention, taking turns, increased confidence, and overall excitement and enthusiasm for the activities.

## Average growth over one year compiled from all four schools



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